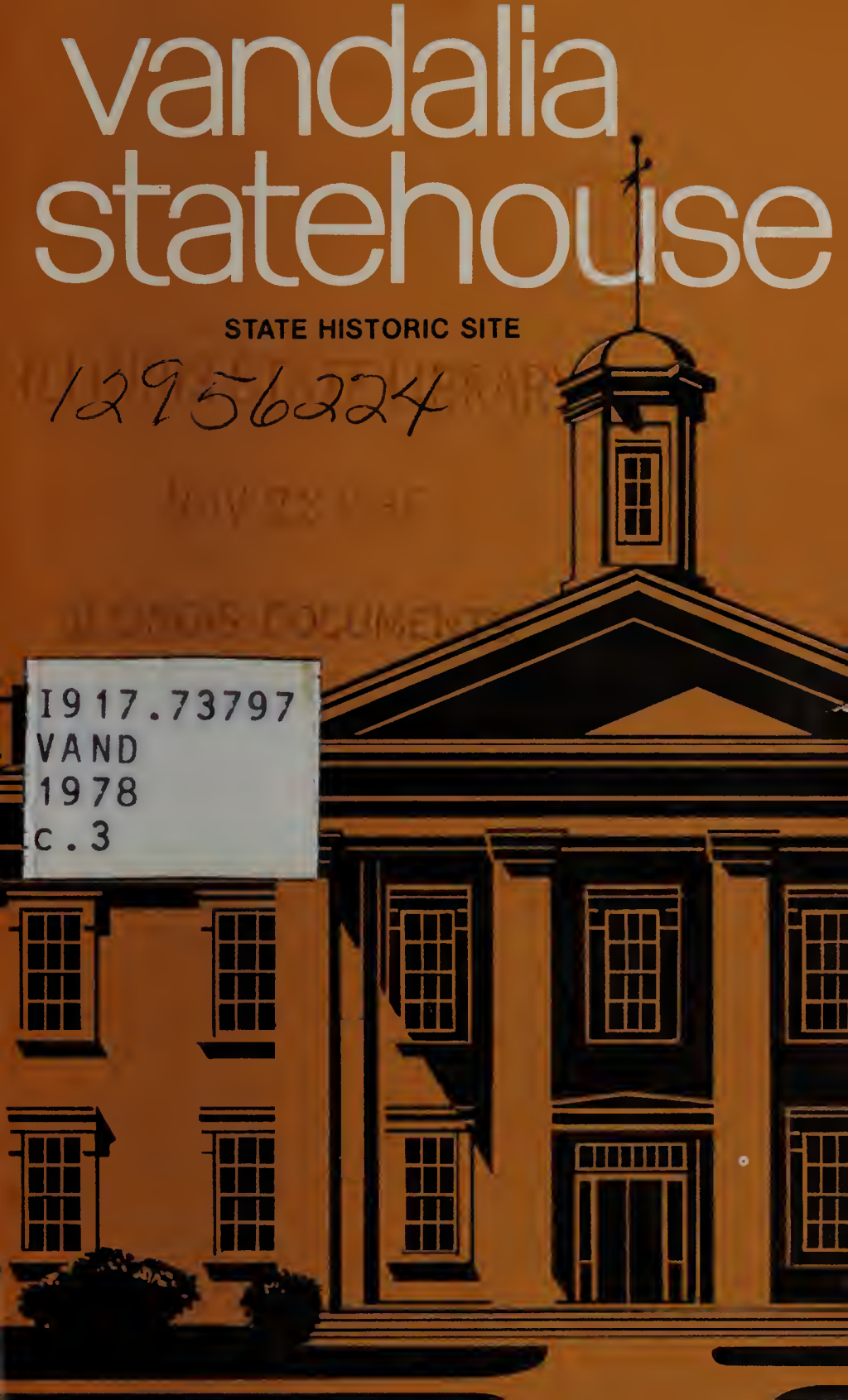


# vandalia statehouse

STATE HISTORIC SITE

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## **CAPITAL MOVED TO VANDALIA**

Although a rented building in Kaskaskia was the first Illinois statehouse from 1818 to 1820, the first Capitol erected by the state was in Vandalia, the capital city from 1820 to 1839.

The removal of the Capital from Kaskaskia to Vandalia was brought about in part by the failure of the U.S. Congress to provide for the customary four sections of land for a seat of government in the enabling act for Illinois' Statehood. The question of location was then addressed in the new state's Constitutional Convention of 1818, which provided that the Capital would remain in Kaskaskia until the General Assembly provided otherwise. The General Assembly was then instructed to petition Congress for land upon which to locate the Capital. When this petition was granted, a board of five commissioners was appointed to select a location and lay out a town.

The Commissioners selected the site on Reeves Bluff, laid out the town, and named it Vandalia.

**Capital City Established:** The site was cleared and a two-story frame statehouse was constructed. The State Archives were brought from Kaskaskia, and on December 4, 1820, the first session of the Second General Assembly met there. Fire destroyed this building on December 9, 1823. Only a few furnishings were saved.

## **VANDALIA REBUILDS**

In 1824, the townspeople remodeled and repaired the State Bank, a two-story brick structure, as the new statehouse. However, this building was in very bad condition at the time of state representative Abraham Lincoln's arrival in 1834.

It was so unsound by 1836 that no one dared to hold a meeting there for fear the building would collapse. Realizing its hopeless condition and desiring to retain the seat of government at Vandalia, some townspeople wrote to Governor Joseph Duncan about the matter. In August, 1836, Duncan authorized Auditor Levi Davis to either have the statehouse repaired, rent a suitable assembly hall for the legislature, or build a new statehouse. The old Capitol was razed, and Secretary of State Alexander P. Field contracted John Hull to provide rock and lime for the new statehouse. William Hodge and John Taylor helped plan the building, and several contractors drew up estimates and constructed the statehouse in less than four months. The building in its original form was an unimposing but graceful and well propor-



tioned example of vernacular Federal architecture. A bill of \$16,378.22 was presented to the legislature in December, although the building was not quite finished. \$10,378.22 was appropriated by the legislature, Duncan drew \$5,500 more from the contingent fund, and the balance was contributed by individuals.

## IMPORTANT DECISIONS

Some of the most important measures in the state's history were discussed and debated in Vandalia, decisions that would affect the state and nation as well. Slavery was one vital issue and much was accomplished here that resulted in Illinois becoming a free state.

Also enacted in the General Assembly during these years were the first school laws of Illinois. The highly controversial State Bank was debated here, in addition to the \$10 million internal improvement acts for railroads and transportation systems. The town of Chicago was incorporated by the 1836-7 legislature, which included Stephen Douglas and Abraham Lincoln, future governor Augustus French, and future Illinois congressmen James Shields, John A. McClernand, John J. Hardin, Edward D. Baker, O.H. Browning, and William H. Richardson.

The state's population increase was mirrored in the increased number of state senators and representatives — 133 in the 1836 legislature as compared to 81 two years earlier.

## CAPITAL RELOCATION ISSUE

As the center of population shifted, proposals were initiated to again move the Capital. In a referendum on this issue in 1834, Alton received about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the vote, finishing only slightly ahead of Vandalia and Springfield. Smaller numbers of votes went to the geographical center of the state, near the present towns of Illiopolis, Peoria and Jacksonville.

Vandalia supporters argued that their town had many advantages, including a new Statehouse, imported vintages at local taverns, advanced living conditions, and other features appropriate to the political and social climate of the state, but as a Galena newspaper editor put it, "Vandalia is a pleasant place enough; but there are other pleasant places nearer the geographical center of the state".

Despite all efforts by supporters of Vandalia and the other towns contending for the Capital, the General Assembly voted to move the Capital to Springfield on February 28, 1837.



Supreme Court.



## BECOMES A HISTORIC SITE

The last session of the General Assembly held in Vandalia began on December 3, 1838 and ended on March 4, 1839. During this session an act was passed conveying the Vandalia Statehouse to Fayette County and the town of Vandalia to be used jointly as a court house and a school. In 1856, the town sold its half of the building to the county for \$3150. The building was remodeled in 1857-1859, raising the roof and adding por-ticoes in the prevailing classical style. Although the State of Illinois bought the building and the square on which it stands in 1919, the structure continued to be used as the Fayette County Courthouse. In 1933 the Illinois Department of Conservation began the ongoing restoration and interpretation of the Vandalia Statehouse.

In 1977 a steel engraving of George Washington, from the painting executed by

early American artist John Trubull 180 years ago, was presented to the statehouse by the Illinois Society Children of the American Revolution.

## FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Nearby Lincoln points of interest are the Lincoln Home, the Old State Capitol and the Lincoln Tomb, all in Springfield. Other state historic sites in the vicinity include Lincoln Log Cabin, Railsplitter, Lincoln Trail, Lincoln Trail Homestead, Lincoln's New Salem, Lincoln Monument, Lincoln Trail Monument, Postville Courthouse, Mt. Pulaski Courthouse and Metamora Courthouse.

For information concerning Illinois State Parks and Historic Sites, write to the Department of Conservation, Land and Historic Sites, Stratton Office Building, Springfield, IL 62706.

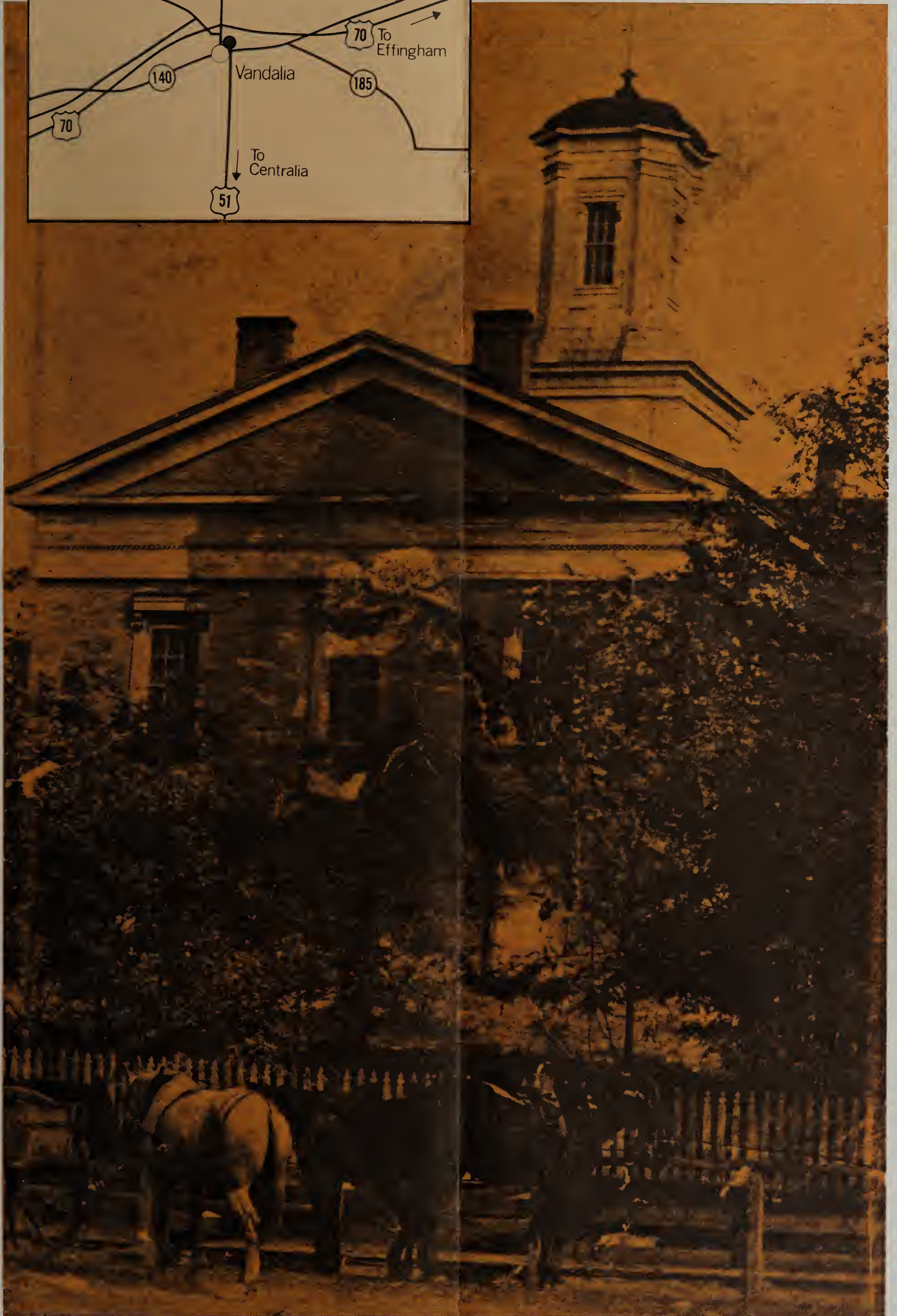


Treasurer's Office.





Vandalia Statehouse circa 1870.







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